

Town of Wenham CPA-Recreation Plan

Background

Wenham has a long tradition of offering diversified active and passive recreational opportunities. These activities are organized and supported by a variety of Town departments including the Hamilton-Wenham Joint Recreation Department, the School Department, the Iron Rail Commission, WVIS and citizen-run sport leagues.

Wenham is fortunate to have playgrounds, playing fields, parks, golf courses, trails and conservation areas broadly distributed throughout the town, as well as a town beach, all of which contribute to enhancing the quality of our lives. The Hamilton Wenham Joint Recreation Department, in collaboration with the Wenham DPW oversees the recreational facilities and activities in Wenham, since the February 2005 disbandment of the Wenham Parks and Recreation Commission.

Resources

Outdoor recreational activities are generally classified as “active” or “passive” and the type of land needed for each is different. Under the CPA, recreational purposes are defined as “active or passive recreational use including, but not limited to, the use of land for community gardens, trails and noncommercial youth and adult sports, and the use of land as a park, playground or athletic field.” In Wenham, passive recreation includes activities like jogging, walking, cycling horseback riding, hiking, fishing and cross-country skiing. Hundreds of acres of land, to include parks, nature sanctuaries, trails and ponds, are available to use for these activities.

Many, many acres of land are available for active recreational programs in Wenham. These activities utilize our playing fields, playgrounds, tennis and basketball courts as well as beach property. Participation is not age specific, ranging from pre-schoolers to seniors.

Playing Fields and Playgrounds

Participation in organized field sports has grown rapidly. Many of these sports, such as baseball, lacrosse, football and soccer, use the same fields and have overlapping seasons. Both the number of children participating in more than one sport per season and the number of adults participating in fall and spring/summer leagues have put great pressure on field availability and maintenance. During the spring season, availability of fields does not meet demand, forcing some user groups to rent field space at nearby private schools. This lack of field availability will begin to severely limit growth in participation.

An important factor in the availability of playing fields is proper maintenance. Funds generated from user fees help support substantial on-going field improvements, such as irrigation systems. The Joint Recreation Department oversees field usage, and tries to rotate and “rest” fields to improve the quality of the turf, thereby reducing maintenance costs. However, the increasing demand for field use does not always permit this turf management practice to be employed.

The Joint Recreation Department has explored acquisition and/or use of privately owned fields. Although the high cost of land prohibits an outright purchase of land, collaborative arrangements have been made with private landowners in the development and maintenance of new playing fields (e.g. The Donovan field in Hamilton)

Pleasant Pond and Beach

For many years Pleasant Pond has been available to Wenham residents as a place for aquatic activities and passive recreational uses such as fishing and boating. Each spring, the State stocks the pond with trout, making it a very popular destination for fisherman. A gravel boat-launching ramp is adjacent to the beach providing access to the pond. The beach is the only public swimming site in town.

In recent years recreational use of the Pleasant Pond Beach has been limited because:

- Water quality has been negatively affected by problems with weed control and occasional high bacterial levels.
- Inability to secure adequate lifeguard staff during the summer. The beach has not had lifeguards for the past 6 summers.
- Traffic and parking concerns.
- Revenue from the sale of beach stickers has not fully supported the staffing, maintenance and enhancement of the facility.

The DPW provides maintenance of the pond and beach area. Recently, a group of area neighbors and concerned citizens joined together to form the Pleasant Pond Neighborhood Association, whose goal is to create and maintain a safe and attractive environment at Pleasant Pond Beach. The group has developed a Master Plan for the area and is exploring non-profit status.

Pingree Park

Pingree Park is an 8-acre field located between Main and Porter Streets. The major attractions are 4 asphalt tennis courts, two Little League fields and one Big League Field, which also serves as a soccer and/or multi-purpose field in season. Additionally, a large wooden playground, swings and slides are located in the park. Picnic tables and benches are also available.

West Wenham Recreation Area (Higgenson Bicentennial Playground)

3.2 acres located on the west side of Route 97, the property contains one asphalt tennis court, one half-sized basketball court. One picnic table with attached benches and a free-standing bench are adjacent to the courts. Beyond the courts is an open field approximately one-acre size used as a practice soccer field.

Iron Rail

In the early 1980's the Town of Wenham purchased the Iron Rail property (a former Girl's Club Camp). Responsibility for the overall management of the property is provided by the Iron Rail Commission. In 1995, the Commission entered into a 25-year agreement with Hamilton/Wenham Youth Soccer for the development and management of soccer facilities on the property. A small soccer practice/baseball field is located adjacent to the DPW Building that is situated on the property.

Buker/Center Schools

Two Little league baseball fields, which also serve as a multi-purpose field in the fall season, a half-sized asphalt basketball court, swings, and a molded plastic playground structure are located on this 7.1 acre property.

Wenham Village Improvement Society

6.3 acres of privately owned land that contains a large wooden playground, three asphalt tennis courts and a small open field, all of which are open to the public. A well-established summer playground program is provided at this location.

Needs

Playing Fields

The need for playing fields is discussed above. The level of participation continues to increase and the availability of field time cannot keep pace with this growing demand. Without the acquisition of new sites, it will soon become necessary to curtail programs and turn interested participants away.

Possibilities include:

- Evaluate exiting undeveloped land and/or acquire suitable land in fee or by easements for new playing fields.
- Installation of synthetic turf at one field and/or the installation of irrigation at the elementary school fields could address some of the field rest issues being experienced.
- Collaboration with the Hamilton Wenham Regional School District related to field development and maintenance on school property.
- Investigate feasibility of developing a full-size multi-purpose field at West Wenham and/or in the context of the housing development being pursued at the Dodge property.

Expanded Recreational Opportunities for Adolescents

Involvement in extracurricular activities, sports and after-school programs keep adolescents busy and productive when out-of-school. Creating appropriate recreational facilities and enhanced programming will allow our youth to socialize, keep physically fit, and be involved in activities that are of interest to their age group.

Possibilities include:

- Creating a teen center
- Developing mountain bike/BMX trails
- Creating a skateboard/rollerblade park
- Adding/improving basketball courts

Pleasant Pond Beach

The absence of lifeguards over the past several summers has contributed to a declining use of the beach by townspeople. Traffic, water quality and safety issues are also concerns. This decline has spurred the formation of the Pleasant Pond Neighborhood Association, a group whose goal it is to rehabilitate, restore and preserve this area. A resident sticker program was re-launched in summer 2005. Despite this commitment, without continued capital investment in the pond's water quality and the beach facilities, it is likely this valuable town resource will continue to experience declining use.

Possibilities include:

- Improving water quality
- Installing an accessible fishing dock
- Employing lifeguards during the summer
- Development/rehabilitation of trails in the surrounding forest
- Enhancing beach and surrounding areas
- Installation of playground equipment

Bicycle Paths/Sidewalks

The construction of additional roadside bicycle paths/sidewalks in key locations throughout the town would not only improve pedestrian and bicycle safety but would also improve access from residential areas by foot and bicycle to existing parks and conservation lands by foot and bicycle, making them more inviting to people of all ages. The current plan, when completed, will create a network of paths that will permit safe travel from Beverly Farms to Topsfield Road, and north to Hamilton.

West Wenham

The West Wenham recreation area is currently under utilized. The small field is used seasonally for youth soccer practice, but otherwise, many people are unaware of its existence. This park could be made more inviting by providing signage and facility enhancements.

Possibilities include:

- Installation of playground equipment
- Improvements to the tennis court, including a backstop and fencing
- Additional picnic tables, benches and trash barrels
- Improving both parking and access to the courts & field,
- Improvements to the basket ball court.

The recreation projects mentioned in this report are examples of possibilities and are not meant to be representative of an inclusive listing of possibilities.

Goals

The CPA in consultation with the Joint Recreation Department and its associated organizations, has identified the following goals for recreational purposes proposed for CPA funding:

- Support a diversity of recreational programs, both active and passive.
- Support the use of a given location for a range of recreational uses.
- Serve a significant number of residents.
- Offer a range of recreational opportunities to all residents, regardless of age, gender or disability.